

## Distance Education

**What change is being proposed?**

**What factors led the organization to undertake the proposed change?**

**What necessary approvals have been obtained to implement the proposed change?**

**What impact might the proposed change have on challenges identified by the Higher Learning Commission as part of or subsequent to the last comprehensive visit?**

**What are the organization's plans to implement and sustain the proposed change?**

**What are the organization's strategies to evaluate the proposed change?**

In its earliest days as a baccalaureate degree granting institution, the University of Minnesota, Crookston recognized the power of electronic information and communication technology to improve teaching and learning and to expand access to underserved learners. In 1993, UMC became the first campus in the country to issue laptop computers to all faculty and half-time or more degree-seeking students. The goal was “to empower everyone with the ability to maximize the potential of the personal computer and related technologies as tools for learning, teaching, and service” (University of Minnesota, Crookston, 2004b).

UMC has been recognized nationally and internationally for its leadership in bringing information age ideas and tools to higher education. Campus honors or recognitions include the following:

- ◆ Named America's #1 “Most Wired” Baccalaureate II college by the *Yahoo! Internet Life Magazine* (UMC ranked #1 on Yahoo! wired colleges list, 2000, April 19)
- ◆ Recognized with the Pioneer Award at the Fourth Annual Conference on Ubiquitous Computing at Seton Hall University (UMC receives ubiquitous computing pioneer award, 2001, January 9)
- ◆ Featured in several notable media stories in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Converge Magazine*, *Online Learning Magazine*, and Minnesota Public Radio (University of Minnesota, Crookston, 2005h)

Today, technology is deeply embedded in campus life and culture. It is integral to the campus mission that “...provides programs that combine theory, practice, and experimentation in a technologically rich environment” (University of Minnesota, Crookston, 2001). Since 1993, the campus has gained a wealth of experience and expertise in using technology to enhance learning in the classroom environment. More recently, it has created the capacity to apply that expertise in the online learning environment. The 2005-2006 budget and planning compact (University of Minnesota, Crookston, 2005f) identified “Online and Distance Learning” as an institutional priority. That document states the following:

*UMC sees revenue potential for online learning by leveraging its talent, infrastructure, and reputation in instructional technology. High-value programs, flexible delivery systems, and exceptional service will create comparative advantage. Access to a University of Minnesota baccalaureate education for underserved, place-bound learners will support regional economic development in northwest Minnesota.*

*Currently, UMC offers the Bachelor of Applied Health online. A Bachelor of Manufacturing Management and Bachelor of Science in Business are being developed in collaboration with the Vice Provost for Distributed Education and Instructional Technology. Issues related to intellectual property are being resolved with the University General Counsel. UMC adheres to the Higher Learning Commission's "Best Practices for Electronically Delivered Degree and Certificate Programs." Courses and programs are subject to the same academic standards and oversight as are traditionally delivered programs. A budget model is being developed with a goal of funding program development with earned revenue.*

In the Handbook of Accreditation (Third Edition, 7.2-1), the Commission recognizes that change "is as constant and rapid as it is challenging and inevitable" and affirms its support for "innovation and change to improve educational quality and to respond to new expectations" (North Central Association of Colleges and Schools - Higher Learning Commission, 2005b). UMC concurs and views timely innovation and well-planned change as being both necessary and desirable in fulfilling the mission and in assuring long-term institutional vitality.

UMC has no plan to shift its primary educational focus as a residential campus but requests blanket accreditation for current and future online degree programs that will enable UMC to meet rising demands for baccalaureate education from learners for whom traditionally delivered programs are inaccessible. Accordingly, UMC has built the capacity and acquired the experience to effectively deliver its programs and support services to distant students, primarily through online learning. The campus has held discussions with its HLC liaison to determine the best way to provide the necessary information and documentation to the Commission. As a result, it was determined that including this chapter in the Self Study Report (versus submitting a separate formal request for approval of institutional change) offered the most reasonable and efficient option.

## Change Being Proposed

The University of Minnesota, Crookston (UMC) seeks authority from the Higher Learning Commission to offer its degree programs, as approved through established campus and University system procedures, using distance delivery methods. Online learning is the primary method, though multiple delivery modes may be used where necessary to achieve course and program learning objectives. UMC is well prepared for this change. The Bachelor of Applied Health program, currently the only online baccalaureate degree in the University with both Regents and HLC approval, has been successfully launched and supported. In addition, UMC serves defined student cohorts under the Commission's site-specific approvals for off-campus delivery of certain programs. However, site-based approvals unnecessarily exclude many students who desire access to quality baccalaureate education without the encumbrances or limitations of geography. UMC recognizes these learners, many of whom are already in the workforce and are not part of the traditional college-age demographic, need and deserve the choice and flexibility online degree programs can offer. Initially, UMC will add two more degrees to its online degree portfolio, the Bachelor of Manufacturing Management and the Bachelor of Science in Business. Proposals to offer these existing degrees to online learners have been developed by UMC faculty (Appendix A). The proposals have been approved at all levels on the UMC campus and submitted to Central Administration for review. The Board of Regents has approved online delivery of the Bachelor of Manufacturing Management degree February 2006, while the Bachelor of Science in Business is expected to be presented to the Board shortly thereafter. The Campus and its Center for Adult Learning will initiate implementation processes as soon as Commission authorization is received.

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## Expected Outcomes of Change

UMC has seen rising demand from online learners (see part 2.B., below). Even with limited marketing, the enrollment in online courses leading to the Bachelor of Applied Health degree has grown substantially, attracting students from across Minnesota and beyond. Using the same model that combines strong academics, effective interactive learning technologies, and superior student support services, UMC now seeks to extend the high quality baccalaureate education access to online learners with other interests and ambitions. UMC does not envision delivering all of its classroom-based programs online. Instead, programs for electronic delivery will be selected according to several factors: (1) faculty support, including a determination that the program can be effectively delivered to online learners, (2) the availability of appropriate instructional technologies and support services to engage students in learning, (3) an expectation that student achievement and satisfaction will be comparable for online learners as it would be in a classroom-based format, and (4) sufficient student demand and campus comparative advantage to grow and sustain the program. Expansion of online programming will strengthen UMC's commitment to service in the public good because a well-educated workforce is increasingly essential to sustainable community and regional vitality. The Center for Adult Learning will connect with businesses, industry and trade groups, civic and economic development organizations, community and technical colleges, the University of Minnesota College of Continuing Education, and other potential partners to reach prospective students.

As a result of this request for approval to offer its degree programs online, UMC will do the following:

- ◆ Grow enrollment by serving more students whose circumstances do not allow them to enroll in traditional, residential programs
- ◆ Improve its financial position by increasing enrollment (above), more fully utilizing UMC's talented faculty and staff, and by earning higher returns on technology infrastructure investments
- ◆ Reinforce its commitment to the campus mission to provide programming in a technology-rich environment and serve the public good
- ◆ Enhance its contribution to the land grant mission of the University of Minnesota by providing greater access to high quality baccalaureate education for diverse and deserving learners
- ◆ Reduce its dependence on the region's declining high school age population and, at the same time, meet a part of the growing world-wide demand for higher education
- ◆ Offer online courses as a scheduling option that will improve graduation and retention by giving some traditional students more flexibility in completing required and elective courses

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## Projected Impact of the Change

**Impact on the UMC mission:** The proposed change is projected to have no impact on UMC's mission. Online education supports the campus mission to serve the public good and the land grant mission of the University. High quality online programs support the University's commitment to access for all qualified learners by reaching underserved populations previously constrained by location, necessities of work, and/or other personal circumstances. UMC's online degree programs will be consistent with the campus' commitment to offering high quality, high-value, career-oriented undergraduate education and to preparing students for rewarding careers and responsible citizenship.

**Impact on the numbers and types of students served:** UMC will design its online degree programs to meet the needs of students who are already in the workplace and who desire or require additional education to achieve their personal and professional goals. Because post-secondary educational attainment in the northwest Minnesota workforce is well below the state average, UMC will prioritize online programs with particular potential to promote rural community vitality and economic development. An educated workforce, including a critical mass of talented business innovators and service providers, is the key to sustainable regional prosperity and social well-being. UMC will, of course, welcome qualified online learners from around the world. With approval of this change, online student credit hours, currently at 3,398, is expected to double in three years.

**Impact on the breadth of educational offerings:** UMC will leverage its national reputation and accumulated expertise as a leader in teaching with technology to meet the rapidly growing demand for flexible, lifelong learning options now being driven by shifting demographics, new global economic structures, and changing employment patterns. However, UMC's presence (and comparative advantage) in the marketplace will be based on superior academic quality and exceptional student service. As a campus of the University, UMC will not launch new programs – online or otherwise – that fail to meet the University's standards of quality, and the quality of existing programs will not be compromised in order to gain online market share.

## Relevant Commission Policy

The Commission policy on “Degree programs offered through distance delivery methods” (I.C.2.b.4) is relevant to this change (North Central Association of Colleges and Schools - Higher Learning Commission, 2005a).

## Factors Leading to the Change

The Crookston campus is making this request based upon commitments to continuously improve and adjust its curriculum to better serve northwest Minnesota and the public good. The 2005-2006 campus compact (University of Minnesota, Crookston, 2005f, p. 3) identifies distance learning as an institutional priority with academic as well as financial benefits. The document states the following:

*UMC sees revenue potential for online learning by leveraging its talent, infrastructure, and reputation in instructional technology. High-value programs, flexible delivery systems, and exceptional service will create comparative advantage. Access to a University of Minnesota baccalaureate education for underserved, place-bound learners will support regional economic development in northwest Minnesota.*

The online learning initiative is consistent with the overall theme of the compact, as it states:

*A new vision for UMC as the “idea place” will position the campus and the University as a regional partner committed to the long term vitality of northwest Minnesota. This vision aligns with the aspirations of the University and at the same time adds value to the region.*

The proposed change fits the mission of the University. Online degree programs are clearly within the University’s mission-driven commitment to enrich “all people” through understanding, and to the sharing of “knowledge through education for a diverse community.”

*The University of Minnesota, founded in the belief that all people are enriched by understanding, is dedicated to the advancement of learning and the search for truth; to the sharing of this knowledge through education for a diverse community; and to the application of this knowledge to benefit the people of the state, the nation, and the world (University of Minnesota, Crookston, 2001).*

In January 2005, as a preliminary step in the University’s strategic positioning process, the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost asked UMC and other coordinate campuses for a document identifying the “goals, mission, vision, and values for your campus” and the strategic directions that are core to that mission (University of Minnesota, 2005e). In that document, UMC identified lifelong learning and online education as a core strategic direction:

UMC will become the regional center for high quality, lifelong learning. It will significantly expand online baccalaureate education to capture the opportunities created by shifting demographics and to address access to post-secondary learning as a limiting factor in regional economic development.

- ◆ Evolving employment patterns are driving rapid growth in demand for web-based learning. UMC’s nationally recognized position as a leader in teaching with technology, combined with a commitment to superior quality and exceptional student support, will create comparative advantage.
- ◆ Applied baccalaureate degrees and others suited to asynchronous delivery will lead the expansion of online programs. UMC faculty will provide academic quality assurance and oversee online student learning and advising.

- ◆ The Higher Learning Commission’s “Best Practices for Online Delivery of Academic Programs” are the guiding operational principles.
- ◆ Targeted, program-specific marketing will support rapid online enrollment growth.
- ◆ Online students tend to be focused, comparative shoppers whose needs and expectations differ significantly from those of residential students. Exceptional “customer service” is essential to success in the online market.

The proposed change is consistent with UMC’s mission, purposes, and plans to become the regional center for high quality, lifelong learning. The expansion of online education addresses issues of access to post-secondary education as a limiting factor in regional economic development (University of Minnesota, 2005f) and the proposed change is consistent with University President Robert H. Bruininks’ recent challenge to UMC (Bruininks, R. H., 2005):

*I have reviewed the BACKGROUND REPORT and ANALYSIS OF CURRENT TRENDS at UMC... It underscores the need for UMC to think carefully and creatively about its future ... demographic, financial, and other trends make it clear that UMC must develop a new strategic direction and strategies to strengthen its future. The promise and potential are there...*

Because of the demographic (and other) trends of which the President speaks, planning for this proposed change began long before his April 2005 remarks. Nevertheless, his sentiments reinforce the role of electronically delivered programs as one of UMC’s “strategies to strengthen its future.”

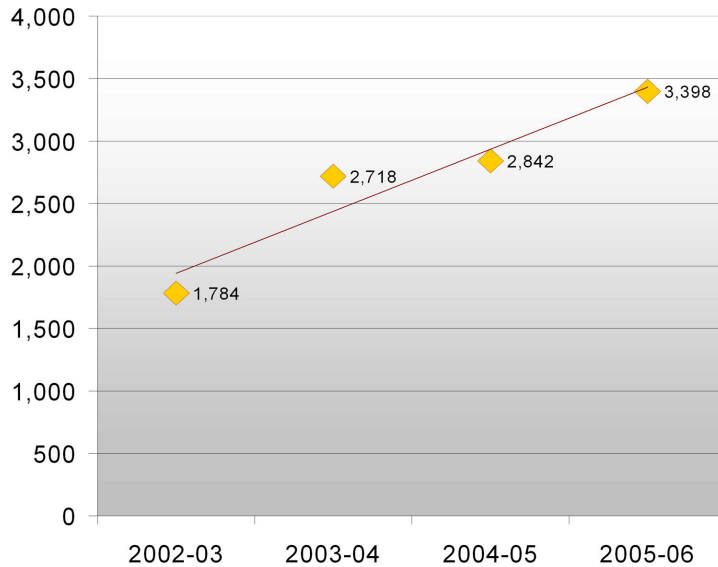
## Needs Analysis

UMC envisions online programming as an integrated strategy to add value to the public investment in the campus and University, address critical regional needs, and serve more learners. The online degrees will not expand the academic breadth of the curriculum, but will expand the access to learning by reaching learners in Minnesota and beyond who are place-bound or who are otherwise precluded from participating in traditional site-based education. Similarly, the online degrees will not alter the mission of the institution, but will extend its impact by assuring greater access to the unparalleled value of a University of Minnesota education.

Online courses can provide a desirable scheduling option for traditional students, but the primary demand (and growth opportunity) for the distance degree is from students who are not now at UMC and would not have the opportunity to attend in the future. While online education is accessible to learners everywhere, UMC is particularly interested in reaching non-traditional students in northwest Minnesota, a region of low post-secondary educational attainment and low per capita income. Among all Minnesotans over 25 years old (2000 census data), one in four holds a baccalaureate degree or higher; in the 11 northwest counties, that number is closer to one in seven. In terms of income, Minnesota ranked 8th among the 50 states in 2002 (\$34,071), but the median per capita personal income in the 11 northwest counties (\$24,000) would have put the region in 47th place. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, the income gap is growing (Study cites rural-urban gap, 2004, November).

Online learning, and the capacity to support it, has grown steadily at UMC. A document prepared for the strategic positioning process called *University of Minnesota at Crookston: An Analysis of Current Trends* (University of Minnesota, 2005f) states: “Compared to other University of Minnesota campuses, Crookston has the highest percentage of WebCT course web sites of all courses offered per semester.” *Figure 6.1* shows recent increases in student credit hours delivered online at UMC.

**Figure 6.1. Online Credit Hours**



Source: University of Minnesota, Crookston, Center for Adult Learning.  
2005-2006 Credits Actual as of February 17, 2006

Nationwide, the demand for online learning is growing rapidly:

- ◆ A *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, *Distance Education: Keeping Up with Exploding Demand*, says “The recent explosion in distance-education enrollments is likely to continue over the next 10 years” (Carnevale, D., 2004, January 30).
- ◆ The Sloan-C Consortium, a group of higher education institutions involved in online education, reports that online enrollment increased from 1.98 million students in 2003 to 2.35 million students in 2004 and that online enrollment growth is ten times greater than projected growth (National Center for Education Statistics) for the general postsecondary student population (Sloan Consortium, 2005).
- ◆ Apollo Group Inc., (University of Phoenix) estimated the 2005 online degree enrollments would grow in excess of 40% over the prior year, with estimated revenue of \$2.27 billion for the fiscal year (Apollo group expects campus, online enrollment to grow, 2004, August 25).

UMC is positioned to meet the needs of learners in parts of this market. However, the potential for significant growth depends on offering online degree programs, not individual courses. UMC’s Center for Adult Learning found that its online learners are mostly female, over 30 years old, and in the workforce. The online learners have already earned a significant number of college credits and are pursuing a baccalaureate degree, rather than taking courses for personal interest or for a specific job need. Offering degree programs online, rather than selected courses, fits this demographic.

To receive Board of Regents approval for new or substantially changed programs (including online programs), extensive needs assessment documentation is required by the University. That documentation includes detailed sections on “Mission, Priorities, and Interrelatedness,” “Need and Demand,” “Comparative Advantage,” “Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Use of Resources,” and “Program Quality and Assessment” (University of Minnesota, 2005). In addition, the University has developed supplementary questions for online programs that must be addressed before the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost will forward to them to the Board of Regents for action (University of Minnesota, 2005c).

### Questions for Electronically Offered Degree/Certificate Programs

1. What is the evidence that the program is consistent with the role and mission of the unit, including its goals with regard to student access?
2. Does the program take the college or campus beyond its institutional boundaries, e.g., students to be served, geographic service area, locus of instruction, curriculum to be offered, or comparable formally stated definitions of institutional purpose?
3. Is the academic and administrative staffing structure appropriate (and fully qualified) to support the program?
4. How are students provided with adequate technical support for each educational technology hardware, software, and delivery system required in the program?
5. How were appropriate learning outcomes established? How does the program design involve the demonstration of such skills as analysis, comprehension, communication and effective research?
6. What provisions for instructor-student and student-student interaction are included in the program/course design and the course syllabus? How is appropriate interaction assured?
7. What support services, including orientation and training, are available to those responsible for preparing courses or programs to be offered electronically? What support services are available to those faculty members responsible for working directly with students?
8. How do potential students learn about the electronically offered program?
9. What criteria are used to determine the student’s eligibility for admission to the program?
10. How are the following services provided to distance-learning students: information about the college, program, courses, and costs; pre-registration advising; admission application, placement, enrollment and registration; and financial aid?

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## Involvement of Constituencies

As matter of institutional strategy, this proposed change is the product of work across the entire UMC community. As noted previously, lifelong learning and online education emerged as one of four strategic directions identified in January 2005. That document, in turn, was drawn from information gathered from faculty, staff, students, alumni, and other external constituencies in formal focus groups and in less formal settings using SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) techniques. Moreover, UMC's development of and commitment to building capacity in online and/or distance delivered education is evident in all of its recent budget and planning compact documents. These documents are prepared by the Office of the Chancellor, but reflect an inclusive process of discussion and contribution by faculty and staff from the campus.

The principle units involved in developing this change include the Center for Adult Learning, three academic departments (Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences; Business; Math, Science, and Technology), the Instructional Technology Center, and the Office of Academic Affairs. Though not directly involved in developing the proposal, University guidance has been provided by the Vice Provost for Distributed Education and Instructional Technology. The Digital Media Center provides continuous system-wide technical support.

The Office of Academic Affairs, academic departments, and governance committees assure quality and integrity for all courses and programs offered by UMC. Committees with a role in such oversight include the following:

- ◆ Academic Department Curriculum Committees
- ◆ Campus Curriculum Committee
- ◆ Faculty Assembly
- ◆ Campus Assembly
- ◆ Academic Standards and Policy Committee
- ◆ UMC Executive Committee
- ◆ All-College Advisory Committee
- ◆ Program Improvement Advisory Committees

In a world where people are changing careers more frequently and where competitiveness in any business or industry is increasingly knowledge based, UMC recognizes that convenient, lifelong access to higher education is a critical need in society and for the economy. However, UMC also recognizes as a campus of the University that high quality (and ongoing assurance thereof) is both expected and essential. UMC and the University have systems and structures in place that enable faculty to effectively exercise academic oversight and quality assurance. The Center for Adult Learning, administrative home for online programming, subscribes to the Higher Learning Commission's guiding operational principles: "Best Practices for Online Delivery of Academic Programs."

## Approvals Obtained to Implement the Change

Changes on the UMC Campus require internal and external approvals.

### Internal Approvals

Curriculum changes on the UMC campus are proposed and approved through the appropriate academic department, the campus curriculum committee, the Faculty Assembly, and the Office of Academic Affairs. The Chancellor is the final campus authority and can accept, reject, or send back for review and revision committee recommendations. Substantive curriculum changes may require approval by University Central Administration (Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs) and the Board of Regents. Changes requiring approval by the Senior Vice President include the following:

- ◆ Adding a new site for the delivery of an existing program
- ◆ Formalizing a domestic or international credit-bearing agreement for an academic exchange or articulation agreement with another institution
- ◆ Changing or adding new course designators and program codes

Board of Regents approval is required for the following:

- ◆ Adding new programs
  - new degree program or major
  - new credit certificate program (baccalaureate or post-baccalaureate)
  - new minor
- ◆ Changing current programs
  - add a formal track to an existing major
  - change a program or unit name
  - change a degree designation
  - discontinue a program
  - offer new distance delivery of all or substantially all coursework for an existing degree program

Student learning outcomes, whether in a course or a program, must be maintained regardless of mode of delivery. Academic integrity and quality is achieved for all online programs because faculty in the appropriate departments and the Faculty Assembly Curriculum Committee must support and grant approval. Campus-level approval to offer an online version of an existing classroom-based course is received from academic department heads in consultation with faculty in the appropriate disciplines. However, Regents approval is required to offer an online option for “all or substantially all coursework” in a site-based program, and this requirement will remain in effect after this proposed change is approved by the Commission.

UMC currently offers one baccalaureate online degree program, the Bachelor of Applied Health, as indicated by the Higher Learning Commission’s revised April 27, 2004, “Status and Scope” document (North Central Association of Colleges and Schools - Higher Learning Commission, 2005c). The Bachelor of Applied Health degree has a liberal education core of 30 semester credits, a program core of 42 semester credits, and an occupational course requirement of 48 semester credits. A total of 120 semester credits are required for graduation (University of Minnesota, 2005a, p. 35). Plans are in place to add two additional online programs as soon as the necessary approvals are secured.

- ◆ The Bachelor of Manufacturing Management degree has a liberal education core of 19 semester credits, a program core of 43 semester credits, and 58 semester credits of evaluated and approved transfer credits and/or electives in business and/or technology. A total of 120 semester credits is required for graduation (University of Minnesota, 2005a, p. 56). This program has been approved at all campus levels and by University Central Administration. The Board of Regents approved the degree program in February 2006.
- ◆ The Bachelor of Science in Business degree has a liberal education core of 45 semester credits, a program core of 63 semester credits, and 12 semester credits of electives. A total of 120 semester credits is required for graduation (University of Minnesota, 2005a, p. 41). This program has been approved at all campus levels. It is currently under review by University Central Administration and expected to be forwarded for Regents' action in spring 2006.

These two programs moved through campus approval processes simultaneously:

Department Approval	March 22, 2004
Curriculum Committee Approval	March 31, 2004
Faculty Assembly Approval	April 16, 2004

Committees within the campus shared governance draft proposals and provide assistance and recommendations. The faculty is responsible for academic quality, integrity, and assessment of student learning. Additional information and assistance in meeting the campus commitment to continuous improvement is provided by the Program Improvement Advisory Committees, the All-College Advisory Committee, and the campus triennial process for review of all baccalaureate programs and minors.

University-level oversight is provided by the offices of the Executive Associate Vice President for Planning and Academic Affairs and the Senior Vice President for System Administration. The Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost and the Senior Vice President for System Administration advise the President, who makes recommendations for action to the Board of Regents.

Detailed information on policy and procedure in these and related areas is available on the web:

- ◆ Campus Assembly
- ◆ Faculty Assembly
- ◆ Office of Academic Affairs
- ◆ Campus Policies
- ◆ University of Minnesota Policy Library

## External Approvals

Approvals external to the campus but internal to the University are described above and in detail at the Office of Planning and Academic Affairs website. Commission approval is required for electronically and distance delivered programs. The Directory of HLC Affiliated Institutions identifies currently approved programs, including the Bachelor of Applied Health (Internet), Bachelor of Manufacturing Management (site specific), and Bachelor of Science in Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management (site specific). UMC has informed Central Administration of this request for blanket accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission to offer electronically delivered programs. UMC is not aware of other required external approvals.

## Impacts of the Change

UMC understands and has responded to challenges identified by the Commission.

### Challenges Related to the Change

The proposed change, if or when approved by the Commission, will directly assist and accelerate the institution's ongoing effort to assure continuous improvement in three of the four areas of concern identified in the report on the last comprehensive visit, February 20-22, 1995, specifically:

- (1) The team identified the need to increase enrollment and reduce cost per student. Significant progress was made in both areas. However, unfavorable regional demographics and other factors have limited enrollment growth in some programs in recent years. Online enrollment, however, continues to show healthy growth. The proposed change will be a significant component of the solution to UMC's enrollment challenge and the related issues of managing per student costs.*
- (2) The team noted that UMC should take care to assure it has the faculty and other resources necessary to offer a sufficiently deep and broad curriculum. Although the proposed change will not drive increased academic depth or breadth, it will help assure access and availability to more students, and increased tuition revenue will be reinvested in the academic enterprise.*
- (3) The team noted that funds available to academic programs for supplies, equipment, and expenses were very limited. Funds to supplement these budgets have been made available whenever possible and course fees have been implemented in some cases, but adequate funding of academic programs remains a challenge. This change will generate new dollars for reinvestment in academic programs, including the supplies, equipment, and expense budgets.*

An evaluation team conducted a focused visit on March 26-28, 2000. The area of focus was "The Transition to a Baccalaureate Institution." Strengths noted by the team include the following:

*UMC has effectively implemented a technology initiative which is a model for other institutions interested in providing notebook computers to all students and faculty.*

Four concerns were identified, one of which is directly related to this proposal:

*The institution has given insufficient attention to such critical matters as needs analysis, marketing, implementation of policies and procedures, developing of support services, assessment, and long range planning in its distance education request.*

In its report, the team suggested UMC should develop a more "thoughtful" business and marketing plan for phasing in distance programs. In response, UMC established the Center for Adult Learning as the administrative unit in charge of online learning. The Center also takes a leadership role in marketing and in coordinating student support services. The Commission responded to the improvements made by granting approval for the Bachelor of Applied Health for online delivery. By starting with a single degree program (University of Minnesota, Crookston, 2005), UMC has had the opportunity to "beta test" its systems to gain a high level of confidence that operational efficiency can be maintained as more online programs are added and as enrollment grows. In addition, UMC's conservative approach to online program implementation includes an expectation that funding for expansion will come from earned income. In this way, no dollars are diverted from existing academic budgets and the overall financial risk to the institution is minimized.

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## How UMC Addressed the Challenges

The challenges described in the focused visit report have more to do with planning (which is discussed at length in other parts of this chapter) than with structure, technology, or support services. Nevertheless, UMC has made significant improvements in each of these areas too.

**The academic and administrative staffing structure is appropriate (and fully qualified) to support the program.**

**Academic oversight:** UMC insists the learning outcomes are the same for students in online courses and students in classroom courses; it is reasonable (perhaps, essential) to align responsibility for academic quality assurance and oversight of online programs with the academic oversight of traditional programs. UMC recently moved from academic Centers to academic Departments. As part of that restructuring, the new departments hold the same responsibilities for online programs as for traditional programs.

**Business development, marketing and administration:** Since the focused visit, UMC has established the Center for Adult Learning (CAL) to take a leadership role in online business development, marketing, and services (non-academic) for online learners. CAL subscribes to the Higher Learning Commission's statement of "best practices" for online course delivery and student support services and, with the Bachelor of Applied Health, has demonstrated its capacity to manage and deliver a high quality online degree program. It was the first fully online baccalaureate degree available from any campus within the University and remains so today. CAL is now fully staffed and has adequate financial support to grow the online enterprise. The Director holds a masters degree in Curriculum and Instructional Design, and two support staff members have baccalaureate degrees in Information Technology Management.

**Technology support services:** UMC's Instructional Technology Center (ITC) was established a decade ago to help faculty integrate technology in curriculum and instruction. UMC's reputation as a leader in teaching with technology is, in part, due to the faculty's aggregate technological and pedagogical expertise developed with the assistance of ITC. Now, ITC's work is moving beyond the classroom to include the development and implementation of instructional technologies in the online environment. ITC, staffed by highly qualified faculty, well trained staff, and talented students, works closely with the Center for Adult Learning and with colleagues on the Twin Cities campus (and elsewhere) on innovation and development issues as well as operations and maintenance. The ITC is housed under UMC's Computing Services, which provides applications, hardware, and infrastructure support with a highly experienced staff.

**Students are provided with the adequate technical support for each course required in the program.**

Day to day administrative management of online programming resides in The Center for Adult Learning, an administrative unit within Academic Affairs at UMC. The Center is responsible for providing timely, high quality services to online students. Center staff members provide services directly or, as appropriate, serve as the primary access point for services offered by other units. The Center for Adult Learning's student-centered philosophy recognizes the needs and priorities of online learners frequently differ from those of their classroom-based peers.

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The mission of the Center for Adult Learning is as follows:

*...to provide high-quality and lifelong learning opportunities for professional development, personal enrichment, career transitions, customized training and academic growth. The Center for Adult Learning fulfills the University of Minnesota outreach mission to facilitate access to outstanding education for a diverse community of adult learners within Minnesota and beyond by utilizing delivery system and technologies that expand access.*

Students find accurate and timely information about the institution, its programs, courses, costs, and policies on the distance education website or by contacting CAL directly. Distance students receive assistance with pre-advising, and CAL works closely with academic units throughout the admissions and registration process, including application, program planning, and transcript evaluation. The Center works in parallel with academic, administrative, and student services units to assure systems and protocols designed for traditional delivery meet the needs of online learners. A recent survey (University of Minnesota, Crookston, 2005c) of online students at UMC provided information on student needs and expectations and showed a generally high level of student satisfaction with their online learning experience. Almost 70% of the respondents indicated they would enroll in another online course, while just over 6% said they would not.

UMC's Office of Financial Aid provides online learners with information about aid policies and limitations, available scholarships and application procedures, and administration of financial aid and scholarship awards. Individual attention for students with learning differences, physical challenges, and counseling needs is provided through personal referral to appropriate Student Support Services personnel. CAL works closely with Student Services to improve access to and efficiency in career counseling, placement services, and tutoring.

Working with its Twin Cities counterparts, UMC is moving quickly to further improve online services by automating as many admissions, financial aid, and registrar office transactions and functions as possible. Students, whether online or on campus, increasingly prefer to access information and complete transactions on the web. For example, students do the following:

- ◆ Receive statements, view accounts, and make payments.
- ◆ Access academic records, including the Academic Progress Audit System (APAS) electronically to review progress and plan coursework.
- ◆ Access library resources and services electronically; UMC is linked directly to the U of M system to make remote resources available to online students. The UMC Library provides online tutorials for students needing library skills assistance and/or orientation.
- ◆ Purchase textbooks from the UMC Bookstore through a secure website.
- ◆ View policies, voice concerns, submit complaints, and file petitions for resolution.

The CAL staff has developed an online help request form for students to report problems or ask questions about access, courses, or other services. The service is available 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, and Center staff members guarantee a response in less than 48 hours, usually in less time.

**Support services, including orientation and training, are available to those responsible for preparing courses or programs to be offered electronically and working with students.**

UMC provides appropriate training for faculty who teach in distance education programs. CAL personnel are qualified and available to assist faculty with elements of design, interactivity, navigational ease, learning assessment, and other features that add value to the online experience. ITC, whose primary objective is to improve student learning by helping faculty integrate technology into teaching, has provided training and support to UMC faculty and staff for more than 10 years.

Extensive faculty development opportunities have been and will continue to be supported by (1) internally funded mini-grants and other grant programs, (2) the Faculty Development fund, (3) departmental budgets, (4) University of Minnesota Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) grants, and (5) compact dollars. In addition, a percentage of online tuition will be set aside by the Center for Adult Learning for reinvestment in course or program development and faculty.

UMC Computing Services group provides hardware and network support staff and works closely with the Digital Media Center at the Twin Cities campus on system-wide course management and related matters.

## Plans for Implementing and Sustaining the Change

Distance faculty hiring meets University of Minnesota standards.

### Involvement of Credentialed Faculty and Experienced Staff

Distance courses are taught by UMC faculty with an interest in teaching online or by adjunct faculty with credentials approved by the appropriate academic department. Online teaching can be part of the faculty teaching load or, when necessary, compensated as an overload. No unwilling faculty member is required to teach online. Adjunct instructors with non-regular, temporary appointments are hired when necessary. The academic credentials required for adjunct faculty are the same as for classroom-based adjunct instructors and, to assure academic quality and integrity, the authority for hiring and evaluating online instructors rests in the academic department.

However, good faculty credentials and solid academic content represent only part of what is necessary for student success and satisfaction in the online learning environment. Online instructors must have good technology skills and a willingness to reliably interact with and respond to online learners throughout the course. CAL works with the academic departments to assure all online instructors meet expectations and has the responsibility to assess how well “customer service” needs and expectations of online learners are met.

Online curriculum follows the same approvals, guidelines, procedures, and processes as traditional campus curriculum. Faculty members have the same set of responsibilities, from determining learner outcomes and preparing the syllabi to grading assignments and assessing learning. The Constitution and Bylaws of the Faculty Assembly, Article II, Powers in General, states:

*In general, functions allocated to the Faculty Assembly shall include but not be limited to, accreditation, establishment and maintenance of academic standards, policies concerning faculty appointment and tenure, curriculum, and faculty affairs.*

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The scope of responsibility accorded the Faculty Assembly does not differ between the online and on-site delivery mode (University of Minnesota, Crookston, 2005g).

Similarly, campus governance committees serve the same functions for online education as for traditionally delivered programs (the Curriculum Committee, for example, provides curriculum review and oversight), and online courses and programs are subject to the same academic administrative oversight at the Department, Vice Chancellor, and Chancellor levels.

Requirements for graduation are determined by the faculty, and learning outcomes at the course and program levels are defined by the faculty. Courses and programs do not differ between modes of delivery. UMC faculty has wide latitude to determine what strategies and pedagogies are best within a given discipline or program area. Faculty “buy in” is far more likely when provided adequate freedom to design online learning experiences that work best for their disciplines.

## Administrative Structure to Support the Change

Crookston campus faculty members assure academic quality and lead efforts to assess and improve student learning for all UMC programs. Policies and procedures for faculty academic oversight of online instruction are the same as or comparable to those for site-based instruction. UMC’s academic administrative structure related to this proposal is as follows:

**Academic Department Offices:** All faculty and for-credit courses and programs are administratively housed in one of five academic departments. Department heads report to the Academic Affairs office.

**Academic Affairs Office:** Includes the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Dean and an Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. In addition to the academic departments, the Center for Adult Learning and Computing Services (including the Instructional Technology Center) report to Academic Affairs. This helps assure academic continuity between online and classroom-based courses and programs and directly connects technology support service functions to the online enterprise.

**Chancellor’s Office:** The Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Dean reports to the Chancellor, as do several other unit leaders. The Chancellor is UMC’s senior executive, reporting to the Office of the Senior Vice President for System Administration (SVPSA) in the Twin Cities. The SVPSA reports to the University President who, in turn, reports to the University of Minnesota Board of Regents. The Board of Regents has final decision-making authority on all University matters.

UMC provides quality assurance. With assistance from the University of Minnesota Office of the General Counsel, agreements covering University expectations and requirements for online instructors and University rights to the future use of online content are in process. These documents are in the near-final draft stage (Appendix B). Implementation will follow appropriate campus discussion and administrative approval.

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## Learning Resources and Support Services Available to Students

In general, distance learners represent a different demographic profile than their campus-based counterparts. Distance learners often have different motivations, different life circumstances, and different priorities and expectations of service than the on-campus population. Access to higher education – when, what, where – is the primary benefit most students see in online learning. However, the Center for Adult Learning believes that in the online market, student satisfaction depends on offering a high quality product *and* a high quality experience. Higher education, like other online markets, is increasingly crowded. Students have many choices and expect credibility, reliability, and service. The Center for Adult Learning is focused on creating comparative advantage by meeting those expectations and, as a result, turning satisfied online students into loyal UMC alumni.

The institution provides access to the range of services required to support online students and programs. The Enterprise System Project and the OneStop Student Services Center provide comprehensive web access to admissions, financial aid, grades, records, registration, and other student services. This system serves both traditional and distance students. Online students can access all necessary information and services by e-mail, telephone, and the web. As is the case with on campus students, academic advising is provided by faculty in the program area. However, CAL personnel provide online students preliminary advising services in order to assure the smoothest possible transition from a prospective student's first inquiry through application, matriculation, registration, and program completion.

A comprehensive document imaging system, currently being used on the Twin Cities campus, is being adopted at UMC. It will improve the speed and reliability of many “front end” and “back room” administrative services. In addition, UMC's FY 2006 compact identifies service excellence as an institutional priority. A second staff position within CAL has recently been hired to support online students, and a new budget model in which revenue for reinvestment in online programs and services will be in place for FY 2007. Online students are exempt from the University requirement for health insurance.

## Financial Data Documenting Capacity to Implement and Sustain Change

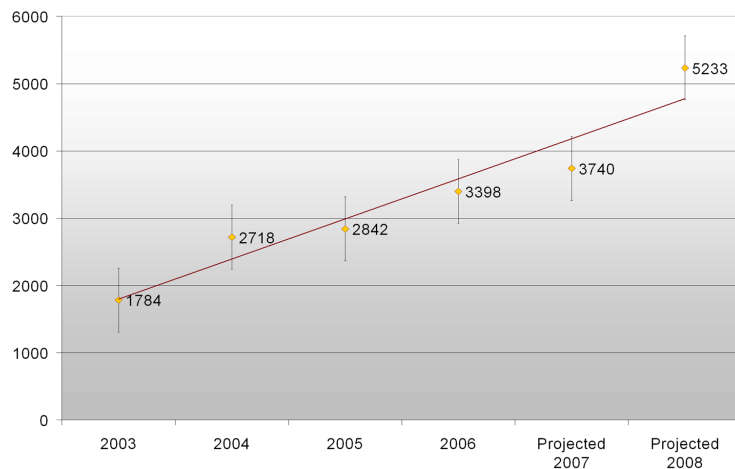
For financial purposes, the most useful measure of enrollment is student credit hours taken. Over the past five years online credit hours have grown from 1,132 to 3,398, a 300% increase. (See *Table 6.1*) A moderate increase in credit hours is projected for 2006-2007, and a substantial increase is projected for 2007-2008 as enrollment in online degree programs increases.

**Table 6.1. Projected Increase in Credit Hours**

	Student Credit Hours Online	Percentage Growth from Prior Year
Year 01-02	1,132	-
Year 02-03	1,784	58%
Year 03-04	2,718	52%
Year 04-05	2,842	5%
Year 05-06	3,398	20%
Year 06-07 (projected)	3,740	10%
Year 07-08 (projected)	5,233	40%

Source: University of Minnesota, Crookston, Business Office, Center for Adult Learning, Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs

**Figure 6.2. Projected Online Credit Hour Growth**



Y-Bar = Standard Error

Source: University of Minnesota, Crookston, Business Office, Center for Adult Learning, Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs

A financial analysis of online course revenue minus related expenses was conducted. A net surplus is shown when subtracting the related cost of operation for the Center for Adult Learning and additional outlays for adjunct and faculty overload salaries from the gross tuition revenue. The cost of faculty who teach online as part of their regular duties is not included.

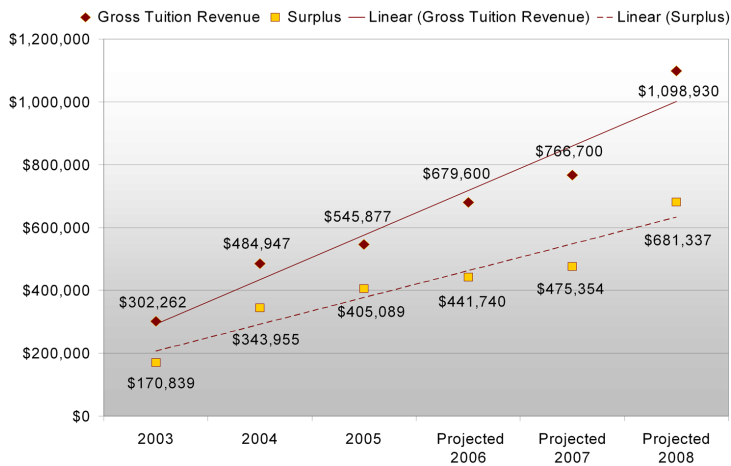
The surplus monies generated by online tuition are steadily increasing, from just over \$108,000 in 2001-2002 to \$405,000 in 2004-2005. Projections for 2005-2006 and beyond suggest online education will be a significant and growing source of new revenue for UMC.

**Table 6.2. Actual and Projected Revenues and Estimated Surplus: 2003 - 2008**

Fiscal Year	2003	2004	2005	Projected 2006	Projected 2007	Projected 2008
Gross Tuition Revenue	\$302,262	\$484,947	\$545,877	\$679,600	\$766,700	\$1,098,930
Surplus	\$170,839	\$343,955	\$405,089	\$441,740	\$475,354	\$681,337
Surplus as percentage of revenue	57%	71%	74%	65%	62%	62%
Credit Hours	1784	2718	2842	3398	3740	5233

Source: University of Minnesota, Crookston, Business Office, Center for Adult Learning, Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs

**Figure 6.3. Projected Surplus Monies from Online Course Delivery.**



Source: University of Minnesota, Crookston, Business Office, Center for Adult Learning, Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs

Table 6.3 compares total online revenue versus centrally allocated funding for the Center for Adult Learning.

**Table 6.3. Financial Analysis of Online Course Delivery 2003-2005**

Center for Adult Learning*			
Description	FY 03	FY 04	FY 05
<b>REVENUES</b>			
Tuition	294,525	458,210	523,140
Central Allocation	22,737	22,737	22,737
Transfers (Net)	-15,000	4,000	0
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>302,262</b>	<b>484,947</b>	<b>545,877</b>
<b>EXPENDITURES</b>			
Salary and Fringe	114,120	123,540	122,940
All Other	17,303	17,452	17,848
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>131,423</b>	<b>140,992</b>	<b>140,788</b>
<b>Surplus (Deficit)</b>	<b>170,839</b>	<b>343,955</b>	<b>405,089</b>

\*Revenue & Expenditures for Distance Ed are "non-audited" numbers, retrieved from Data Warehouse.

Source: University of Minnesota, Crookston, Business Office, Center for Adult Learning, Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs

## Timelines to Implement the Change

The proposed change will be implemented gradually. The Bachelor of Applied Health is already approved by the Commission. Pending Regents approval (below), this change will allow UMC to move forward with two more programs.

February 2006	University of Minnesota Board of Regents approved the Bachelor of Manufacturing Management for distance delivery.
April 2006	University of Minnesota Board of Regents is expected to approve the Bachelor of Science in Business for distance delivery.
April 2006	Higher Learning Commission team visits UMC (24-26) for a comprehensive evaluation, including this proposal for electronic delivery of all UMC programs.
June 2006	Approval of change request received from the Commission
July 2006	CAL budget model supports expansion of online learning with earned income.
August 2006	Implementation of document imaging system to improve student services
August 2006	Electronic delivery of the Bachelor of Manufacturing Management and the Bachelor of Science in Business degree programs is launched.
Fall 2006	Begin processes of review leading to the development and Board of Regents approval of additional programs. Online degree programs will be added based on assessments of capacity to deliver, faculty interest, marketplace opportunity, and student demand.

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## Strategies for Evaluating the Change

The change will be evaluated from four perspectives: academic integrity, contribution to the mission, financial performance, and value to students.

### Measures to Document Expected Outcomes

**Academic Integrity:** UMC has made significant investment in faculty to develop the technological and pedagogical expertise necessary for student success in an online environment. Effective administrative oversight is assured by a structure that connects the Center for Adult Learning, the Instructional Technology Center, the Office of Academic Affairs, and the Academic Departments. Most importantly, responsibility for the academic quality and integrity of online courses and programs rests with the faculty, as is the case for campus-based education.

**Contribution to the Mission:** The educational mission of the campus and University govern priorities and decision making.

**Financial Sustainability:** Online programs are expected to increase enrollment, generate tuition revenue, and reduce the campus' overall cost per student credit hour delivered. UMC's finance office will continue to work with Academic Affairs and CAL to monitor progress and measure results. A central allocation supports CAL's baseline staffing needs. Program growth, and the cost of operations associated with that growth, will be paid with revenue earned. In addition, new revenues will be directed to (1) marketing and promotional activities, (2) course, program, and instructional technology development, (3) faculty professional development, (4) enhanced student support services, and (5) budget supplements for academic departments offering online courses and programs.

**Student Value:** Student satisfaction information, along with online student demographic data, is collected using a CAL survey instrument (University of Minnesota, Crookston, 2005c). The survey was first administered in 2004, and results were positive. Only 6% did not expect to take another online class, while 70% would enroll again. An updated survey is scheduled to be given this year and will be regularly administered to track progress and trends. Direct communication, primarily through e-mail and telephone, provides reliable, real-time feedback on student satisfaction. CAL collects this information and uses it to improve and adapt systems and structures to the needs of online learners. Where identifiable cohorts exist, perhaps within a particular company where students receive an employer-paid tuition benefit, CAL will collect satisfaction data from students and employers and apply what is learned to the continuous improvement effort.

## Integration of Student Learning Assessment

Education at UMC is defined by the same high expectations and standards, regardless of the mode of delivery. Academic programs delivered online have the same expectations of student learning and assessment thereof. The assessment protocol in place at UMC and the systems being implemented to assure ongoing support for continuous improvement are detailed in Chapter Three of this report.

As an institution, UMC does not distinguish the assessment of student learning for online programs as being different in any substantive way than the assessment of student learning for face-to-face programs. This includes the summative and formative assessment, learning outcomes, and core components managed by UMC faculty.

Institutional research, faculty and staff evaluation, student satisfaction, and surveys of new students are performed by UMC's Office of Institutional Research, which includes all students onsite and online. Lastly, program reviews, a report based on Faculty Assembly criteria, are conducted for efficiency and effectiveness by program faculty.



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## Appendix A

### Online Program Proposals

1. Bachelor of Manufacturing Management
2. Bachelor of Science in Business

## Appendix B

### Agreements for online instruction and content

1. Instruction by a non-University employee
2. Commission & License Agreement for Online Course Material by a University employee
3. Commission & License Agreement for Online Course Material by a non-university employee
4. Commission Agreement for Online Course Material by a University employee
5. Commission Agreement for Online Course Material by a non-university employee

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